

School inspection report

24 to 26 September 2024

Forest School

College Place

Snaresbrook

London

E17 3PY

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders have thorough skills, knowledge and understanding in all areas of school life. They create a culture of inclusivity and openness where pupils and staff express their views, contributing to the continued development of the school. Leaders are reflective and progressive in outlook, constantly seeking to improve. However, communication with parents is not fully effective. As a result, some parents do not feel that they are appropriately consulted and informed about the school's work.
2. The governing body quality assures the work of leaders and managers effectively. They provide support, challenge and a strong strategic vision for the school's development, making considered decisions about the character of the school.
3. The quality of education is strong throughout the school. The wide and varied academic curriculum supports pupils to develop and progress in all areas. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and adapted to ensure pupils are prepared well for their adult lives whilst maximising current enjoyment and engagement.
4. Academic attainment is high overall, with GCSE and A-level results well above the national average. Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make very good progress from their starting points. However, the school's strategies to support pupils are implemented less effectively in a few subjects than in others. As a result, there are some subjects in which attainment is comparatively less strong. Leaders are working on a range of strategies to address this.
5. Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive. They have a sense of pride in and ownership of their learning. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. They are confident when making choices about their learning and wellbeing. Pupils are respectful, tolerant and inclusive, challenging unfairness when it arises. Instances of bullying and poor behaviour are rare and, when they do occur, they are dealt with effectively.
6. Pupils are taught to understand the important elements to leading a balanced and fulfilled life. This is supported by a well-planned and led relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) programme. Pupils benefit from a varied programme of co-curricular activities. This strong programme supports pupils' physical and mental wellbeing, encouraging them to develop interests beyond the classroom.
7. The school has a strong safeguarding culture which promotes the welfare of pupils. Leaders emphasise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and the most important thing they do. Leaders liaise well with outside agencies, where appropriate, to ensure pupils receive the support they need. Pupils feel safe at school and know what to do to keep themselves safe online and in the real world.
8. The early years provision is a significant strength of the school. Leaders in this area have a particularly deep understanding of how children's skills, knowledge and understanding develop. They use this highly effectively when considering all aspects of provision so that children progress particularly well and flourish in the early years.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- review strategies that support pupils' progress in the senior school so that all pupils achieve as well as possible in all subjects
- develop ways to enhance communications so that parents feel well informed about and engaged with the school's work.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have appropriate knowledge and skills, which they enhance through further training from external professional bodies. They fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leadership roles are clearly defined to ensure effective delivery of the school's strategic plans. Governors are highly knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for development. They visit regularly and use meetings and sub-committees to ensure the Standards are met.
10. Leaders actively promote the wellbeing of pupils in all the decisions they make. Leaders are both aspirational and realistic. Their expertise combine with their belief in the school's aims and ethos, informing every aspect of planning, delivery and evaluation. A highly collaborative approach to leadership, within and across the prep and senior schools, is a key factor in enabling pupils to feel happy, safe and able to make good progress.
11. Leaders and governors regularly check and reflect on how well the school is doing. They use data to identify patterns and trends. They make changes to processes with the aim of enhancing pupils' wellbeing and attainment.
12. Leaders and governors have a clear strategic plan for the school's future. They consult with pupils and staff as they draw up future actions, allowing them to be responsive to pupils' emerging needs. For example, a request by some pupils for halal food led to a redesign of and investment in kitchen facilities. The impact of strategic decisions is monitored by leaders and governors. Since the previous inspection, lessons in the senior school have become fully co-educational and the impact of this is regularly reviewed.
13. All required policies are in place. They are regularly reviewed to allow for rigorous monitoring of all aspects of school life. Policies are immediately updated and reviewed by governors in the light of new legislative guidance. Policies are shared appropriately with staff and pupils and are widely understood.
14. Key information is provided to other stakeholders, including parents, via the website and other communications. Parents are provided with regular reports about their children's progress and attainment. However, general communication with parents is not as effective as it could be. Parents are not always consulted about school matters, when it would be appropriate for them to be given the opportunity to contribute their views. This leads to some dissatisfaction among the parent body.
15. Leaders develop productive relationships with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners. They have a collaborative arrangement with an external counselling service which operates on-site, which provides pupils with an extra layer of support. An on-site leisure centre provides specialist resources to pupils, enhancing their sports provision.
16. Leaders identify potential risks to pupils' wellbeing thoroughly, including road safety, off-site trips, recruitment and potentially hazardous activities. They implement policies and protocols to mitigate them effectively. Policies provide staff with clear direction and are followed well in practice.
17. Leaders deal with complaints appropriately and record them diligently. Records show clearly the justification for actions taken or not taken. Leaders reflect on this information and use it to identify any trends.

18. Leaders take their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 very seriously. The education provided by the school does not discriminate. A suitable and up-to-date accessibility plan is in place. It considers both access to the site and to the curriculum and is kept under review by leaders and governors. Recent buildings, such as the prep school, show thoughtfulness of design to support pupils' wellbeing and investment in accessibility.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The curriculum enables pupils to study a range of subjects with a wide choice of creative and practical options in Years 5 to 9. It is well suited to the ages, aptitudes and needs of pupils. All pupils in Year 10 and Year 12 undertake research projects to develop their scholarship skills, intellectual curiosity and time management. Activities are integrated across subjects in the prep school to nurture critical thinking. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Results at GCSE and A level are well above the national average, with over three quarters of all GCSE exams at Grades 9-7 and over half of A Level results at A or A*.
21. Schemes of work are carefully planned by subject leaders to enable pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Collaborative planning allows for content and skills to be developed at increasing levels of complexity. As a result, pupils of all ages become eloquent, confident and communicate clearly.
22. In the early years, children receive the attention they need. The stimulating and highly effective 'enquiring me' curriculum builds children's knowledge and skills particularly well. It celebrates children's curiosity and encourages them to solve problems. Learning is linked to real-life situations wherever possible. Teachers use the stimulating outdoor space in their curriculum planning. Teaching is sensitive to each child's needs, resources are carefully chosen and the environment is stimulating yet calm. As a result, children are notably confident and articulate for their age. They progress particularly well during the Reception Year so that they are exceptionally well prepared for Year 1.
23. Leaders have introduced approaches to further support pupils in the senior school. These are focused on helping pupils to fulfil their potential and make as much progress as possible. For example, a recent focus on examination technique has increased pupils' confidence and helped them to attain more highly. However, these strategies have not been fully adopted in all subject departments. Where this is the case, pupils make less progress and do not attain as well as they do in other areas.
24. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about the subjects they teach. They deliver engaging lessons and are clear about what they want pupils to learn. Teachers give pupils appropriate tasks to do, with suitable support and challenge. For example, in English lessons, pupils are offered autonomy to plan pieces of creative writing, with prompts available to those who need more guidance. Pupils with high prior attainment also benefit from a super curricular programme. Teachers share ideas and strategies with each other, which helps them to develop the effectiveness of their teaching practice.
25. Leaders track pupils' progress closely and intervene, when necessary, to mitigate against under-achievement. Pupils receive targeted feedback from their teachers which helps them to take responsibility for their own learning and to improve their work.
26. Teachers employ effective classroom management techniques to ensure time is not wasted. They ensure that all pupils contribute during lessons. Skilled questioning techniques support pupils to develop their oracy skills and to think deeply. Teachers give pupils opportunities to work on their own as well as in paired or group activities. This helps them to become independent and articulate.

27. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points and achieve in line with their peers. Their needs are identified early and effective support plans are put in place so that they do not fall behind. These are regularly reviewed and strategies are adapted to ensure they are effective. Teachers are given regular training that helps them to meet pupils' individual needs.
28. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate support. This helps them to develop fluency and literacy. Pupils who speak EAL make similar progress to their peers.
29. The school provides an extensive extra-curricular programme, with some activities taking place during the day. There are many opportunities for pupils to hone existing skills and develop new interests in sports, drama and music as well as through clubs such as film making, gaming and political debating. Pupils are consulted about the programme and many clubs are led by pupils allowing them to develop leadership and teamwork skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 30. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

31. The school has an ethos of mutual respect and pupils are kind and tolerant. Pupils appreciate the individuality of others and feel they can be their authentic selves. There is a strong focus on matters of equality, diversity and inclusion. Sensitivity and inclusivity are shown in the choice of resources and language used throughout the school. Leaders and pupils plan regular events, such as 'fusion day', which help pupils to demonstrate and appreciate their own cultural heritage and learn about that of others. Pupils are proud of the school community to which they belong.
32. Spiritual awareness is developed through lessons, assemblies, events and weekly chapel services. All faiths are celebrated. Pupils value the recently redesigned areas where they can be quiet and reflective during their busy days. In Reception and pre-prep, careful use of materials and colours ensure a calm environment that avoids over-stimulation. In the early years, each class has weekly supervised activities in the woods which help them to appreciate the natural world and how to care for it.
33. Pupils understand how to live happy and healthy lives. They are offered several hours a week of timetabled sport which caters to all, from elite sports people to those who dislike traditional sports, with older pupils offered an element of choice. Pupils study food and nutrition in Years 7 to 9 and learn about healthy diets and food hygiene. The physical development of children in the early years is nurtured by easy access to a well-designed play area.
34. The recently redesigned RSHE and personal development programmes use age-appropriate materials, designed in association with professional experts and adapted for the school's context. The assembly and RSHE programme intertwine to allow for topics such as vaping, for example, to be introduced then explored in more detail. There is a blend of pre-planned and responsive topics so that issues can be both prepared for and responded to. The programme is delivered by trained staff who know pupils well and is augmented by talks from external specialists. Leaders of the RSHE programme consult with local authorities about key local risks, for example road safety and using public transport, and ensure education about these is included in the topics covered.
35. Pupils behave well. They understand the clear sanctions policy and the school's focus on positive behaviour. Pupils welcome the conversations with staff that help them understand the impact of their behaviour when incidents arise. Children in the early years are very well supported to manage their emotions and show consideration to others. Even in the simplest tasks, such as lining up or packing away, teachers gently insist on order and self-regulation. Leaders keep records methodically, facilitating reflection and the identification of patterns.
36. Bullying is rare. When incidents do occur, leaders take appropriate and prompt action, providing both consequences and support. Pupils appreciate that there are many trusted adults with whom they can share concerns about bullying, should they arise.
37. Pupils are supervised well. Suitable numbers of staff are on duty at breaktimes, positioned in key locations around the school. Pupils know how to seek help if needed.

38. Admissions and attendance registers are kept appropriately, with all the required information. Leaders track attendance and take action where necessary. The local authority is notified when pupils leave the school outside the usual transition points.
39. The premises and accommodation are well maintained, with all regulatory health and safety requirements met. Classrooms, corridors and public areas are clean and attractive. There is a clear sense of shared responsibility for health and safety matters across the school. Leaders in this area have deep expertise which they enhance through specialist training.
40. The school's medical provision is extremely well developed. Children with medical needs or illness at school are looked after by professionals, including a full-time on-site doctor. All staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid. Staff in the medical centre provide training to other staff and to parents through a webinar programme.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 41. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Leaders regularly review the curriculum to ensure it prepares pupils for their role in society. For example, recent adjustments to the curriculum have introduced engineering into the prep school and a course in dialectics and civics into Year 8 to teach critical thinking and oracy. The highly effective RSHE and personal development curriculum addresses pupils' social education well.
43. Leaders and staff go to great lengths to ensure individuals are respected for their identity and differences. Pupils challenge behaviour which is inconsistent with respect for others. Engagement with different communities within the local and wider area results in pupils developing an understanding of people from a range of backgrounds. A wide range of cultures and beliefs are embraced through events and assemblies, where languages and cultural heritage are celebrated.
44. Leaders ensure there is a balanced perspective on political or social issues. They are aware that the pupils often have strong views on current issues. Leaders ensure that societies are overseen by staff so that pupils' opinions are channelled in a positive and balanced way. Personal development lessons teach pupils positive ways to disagree.
45. The overwhelming majority of pupils proceed to higher education, either university degrees or degree apprenticeships. However, to ensure balance, the school refers to 'next steps and futures' rather than just to higher education. The work of the careers department is firmly rooted in national guidance such as the Gatsby benchmarks. Pupils are encouraged to think widely and open-mindedly about their professional futures, inspired by personality assessments, investment in specialist resources and visits by adults from the workplace.
46. Leaders have created an array of leadership opportunities to help pupils develop a sense of service and responsibility. Even the very youngest children earn badges for positions such as being a 'playground pal' or for trying new things and sticking with their chosen extra-curricular activities. The pupil parliament is open to pupils from Year 3 upwards. The pupil councils meet termly and bring about changes requested by pupils. Pupils regularly organise fundraising events for local charities. Each house chooses a cause to support that requires them to collaborate, prioritise and plan events.
47. Leaders capitalise on the school's locality to set up partnerships that aid pupils' personal development and to expand the opportunities on offer to them. Pupils benefit from links with a theatre, local charities and other local schools.
48. The personal development programme includes learning about key British institutions, the law, financial and political literacy, and fundamental British values. There are planned opportunities in lessons to explore these topics. Activities such as democratic elections, and multiple pupil forums allow pupils to experience democracy in action.
49. Pupils' economic understanding is developed by planned activities across the curriculum. Extra-curricular activities, such as house fundraising and Model United Nations, provide additional opportunities in this area. Pupils in the prep school role play shopping to learn about money. The personal development programme covers a range of topics such as tax, loans and credit cards.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

51. A strong safeguarding culture is firmly entrenched throughout the school. There is a humble and reflective understanding that 'it could happen here'.
52. The safeguarding policy is detailed and compliant with current guidance. Procedures are robust, with incidents recorded in a way which allows for reflection and the identification of patterns. Reporting to external agencies is appropriate and timely.
53. Those with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately qualified, proactively seeking advanced training to support them in their work. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and team give regular update training to all staff. The effectiveness of training is supported through an online assessment to check for understanding. Staff understand how to keep pupils safe and follow the school's procedures when issues arise. They report concerns promptly and the DSL and team take timely and appropriate action in response to them. Staff are aware of the 'Prevent' duty and their responsibilities in this area.
54. The process for appointing new employees is thorough and well organised. The school undertakes all appropriate pre-appointment checks on new employees. The checks are recorded appropriately in the school's single central record, which is regularly checked by leaders and governors. Staff involved in recruitment undergo safer recruitment training.
55. The governing body has effective oversight of safeguarding policy and practice. The designated safeguarding governor and the chair of governors are informed of all safeguarding issues. Leaders provide termly reports to the governing body about safeguarding.
56. Pupils feel safe at school. They are confident that any concerns they may have will be taken seriously and acted upon. There is comprehensive filtering of the internet in place and pupils are educated about how to stay safe online. Pupils are clear about how to report problems, including issues that occur out of school. The safeguarding team are aware of the vulnerabilities of certain groups, such as pupils with disabilities, and their needs are addressed accordingly.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 57. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Forest School
Department for Education number	320/6000
Registered charity number	312677
Address	Forest School College Place Snaresbrook London E17 3PY
Phone number	020 8520 1744
Email address	office@forest.org.uk
Website	www.forest.org.uk
Proprietor	Forest School
Chair	Mr David Wilson
Headteacher	Mr Marcus Cliff Hodges
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	1495
Date of previous inspection	20 January 2023

Information about the school

58. Forest School is a co-educational day school in Snaresbrook, London. It officially opened for male pupils as Forest Proprietary Grammar School in 1834. Female pupils were admitted at the end of the 1970s. It was originally a boarding school, becoming a day school by 1981. It consists of an early years setting, a prep school for pupils in Years 1 to 6, a senior school for those in Years 7 to 11 and a sixth form. Fully co-educational teaching has been introduced in the senior school since the last inspection. The school underwent a material change in 2023 and expanded its numbers, including in the early years setting. The school is administered by a board of governors known as the governing council.
59. There are 61 pupils in early years, comprising four Reception classes.
60. The school has identified 250 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
61. English is an additional language for 102 pupils.
62. The school states that its aims are to put the individual child at the centre of all it does and to promote the values of growth, hard work, diversity, responsibility, wellbeing and community. It aims to provide an outstanding all-round education for all pupils which consists of excellent academic teaching and learning, superb pastoral care, and excellent opportunities outside the classroom.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 September 2024

63. A team of 8 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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